RANDY BUREKER
AN INTERVIEW BY STEVE JONES
COTATI 1990

Prologue:

Randy Bureker and Steve Jones have been acquainted for 27 years at the time of this conversation.

Randy has raised chickens and produced eggs and been in the feed business in Cotati and Petaluma since the early 1930's.

Steve moved to Sonoma County in 1961, was with the Cotati branch of a local bank in 1963-64, then again from 1967 to 1973. This was Randy's bank. In those years, the nearest bank was 8 miles distant, in Petaluma, Sebastopol, and Santa Rosa. (Things have changed.)

Steve drives and collects old cars. Through the 1980's, Steve has been a tenant of Randy's, renting an old chicken barn on Randy's home property, where parts cars and maybe-future-project cars are stored.

In 1989, Randy sold his ranch to investors-speculators. Steve remains as a tenant of the barn. Randy has spent the last year traveling around California and Iowa, staying with family and old friends. During this time, Randy has stayed with Steve at Steve's cottage for periods of several weeks.

So we have become closer friends in these past 10 years.

At the time of this conversation, Randy is staying at the home of his younger son, daughter-in-law, and 2 grandchildren in Redondo Beach, California.

Randy's health has always been good, and he has always been a strong, hard-working man. In the last several years he has suffered from some heart problems.

Randy has just finished a major retaining wall, wood and concrete, at the Redondo Beach home. He is proud of it, refers to it as the Great Wall of China.

He has recently injured his leg. Nothing permanent or serious, but he is on crutches for a while.

We had been planning and postponing this recorded conversation, for the Chicken House Project of the Petaluma Museum, for some time. Over New Year's weekend Randy has ridden up with his Redondo Beach family. Randy is staying at a local motel for a few days, to see old friends here. At this time his kids and grandkids are visiting with Randy's older son and family in Walnut Creek, California, just 1 1/2 hours south.

After our conversation, Randy's kids and grandkids were back to the motel to pick up Randy, and they all headed south again.

RANDY BUREKER
recently of
8028 Gravenstein Highway
Cotati

interviewed by Steve Jones
January, 1990

Steve Jones: OK. Hello, Randy Bureker. This is Steve Jones and Randy Bureker, together.

AN IOWA FAMILY FARM BACKGROUND

Randy, let's see now. You're born in Iowa, in 1910 [or 1908?]. And your father comes from Germany at the age of 6. And your mother is born in Iowa, with a Swiss father. So, I guess you'd be Swiss German, eh?

Randy Bureker: That's it.

SJ: And tell me a little bit about your farm in Iowa, your family farm. And then tell me, please, how you happened to come here, and how you happened to stay here, what you were doin' here.

RB: Well, our farm was a hundred and sixty acres there. And then we rented another 80 acres. We raised grain, and the grain was all fed into livestock, hogs, cattle. We never bought a bushel, and never sold a bushel. That's the way we operated.

SJ: You sold the cattle and hogs. You said a lot of hogs.

RB: Right. Mostly the hogs, as far as that's concerned. We raised them from little pigs on, farrows there, and in the eighties, around eighty to a hundred head a year. Then, but the cattle: we milked usually 8 or 10 cows. And well, in those days we didn't have any proteins and all that to feed into the hogs. So, the big end of it was corn, and that was their main diet. But the milk we separated, and the cream from the milk, there, we was selling that. And maybe a couple hundred hens, laying hens. That took care of our living expenses.

SJ: What kind of chickens were they?

RB: Well, there was a Bard Rock, in those days, there. It was a heavy bird. Yup. And the cattle, well, then we'd sell off so much every year. And we had the milking shorthorn. In other words, they was a dual purpose. They wasn't heavy milkers. And they wasn't the top in beef. But the big end of the people in that area had those, at that time. Hereford is a better producing meat, cheaper and everything. But, they'll hardly

give enough, sometimes, milk for one calf, where, these cows . . . . we had some of them there that would go, maybe, five and six gallons for a while. In those days we didn't feed any dairy feeds or anything of the kind.

And, like the guy says, I gave them what I got, and took what they gave me. (laughs)

SJ: In those times in Iowa, who did you sell your products to?

RB: Well, we belonged to the Farmers' Union. And when we had the hogs ready to sell, in those days it was all wagons, team and wagons. Trucks was just startin' to come in about then. And we'd get two or three neighbors, whatever we needed, we'd put about seven or eight hogs to a wagon, haul them into the stockyards in Fairfield, and then they were shipped to Chicaga. And they had a man selling 'em there. Each person's hogs were branded. So, that's the way they kept track of 'em, as far as that's concerned. Cattle, most of the time, that was just a livestock dealer. Yup.

SJ: Something occurs to me: When you were livin' in Iowa, and growin' up, and your parents . . . . Were you involved at all, or your parents involved at all, with any Swiss-German associations of people?

RB: No, no. See, during the First World War, oh, they were terrible against anyone that . . . .

SJ: That's right. I recall (from reading history).

RB: And, you had to be very, very careful of everything that was said and done.

Yup. And no, we never carried any of the old-country traditions. My dad was very fluent in German. In other words, there was two, high German and a low German, or flach-deutsch. And he was versed very well in . . . . In fact, his mother, for any woman at that time, was very well educated, way beyond what most women were.

SJ: So he had come with his parents here when he was six. So his parents were living here at that time also.

RB: Yup.

SJ: In Iowa.

RB: Right.

A FAMILY VISIT TO CALIFORNIA

SJ: Let's go from Iowa to California. So, tell me, please, how you happened to come here, how you happened to stay here, how you got involved with your work here, and so.

RB: Well, I think it was '28, '27. Dad had two brothers, one livin' in Los Angeleees, the other here in Petaluma. And the one in Los Angeleees came out, and it was the first time he'd been back there for 28 years.

Of course, your mode of transportation, trains, and all that was nothing like they are today. And he talked Dad into it.

In 1929 we drove out. Dad and Mother and one of my Sisters. And it was all dirt roads.

They didn't have any highways. It was all dirt roads. We traveled what they called the Lincoln Highway. Usually, goin' into a town, they'd be a 4 by 4 [4" x 4"] post standin' maybe a foot high, painted a certain color. And goin' out, you'd see the same thing. There was no signs, nothing whatever.

SJ: No pavement at all, from Iowa to here?

RB: We had it, we had it in as far as Omaha. We had two paved roads, crisscrossing the state. But other than that I don't think we saw any paved roads or anything until we got into California.

I think from here going back Sacramento was the last. At that time going through the Sierra, it was just cut wide enough for one car, with a pocket every block or something of that kind. So, if we had met another car, in there, the car going downhill had to back up. And they'd have to back into that pocket, that you could get by . . . . because otherwise . . . . it breaks trail or something of the kind, and they'd be over.

SJ: What kind of car were you coming across in, in 1929?

RB: A Whippet.

SJ: Was that a real sign of distinction to be owning a car in 1929?

RB: No. It was something unusual for anyone to travel that far. And I think it was the first day out, we drove 12 hours. And we covered 319 miles.

Well, at that time a lot of that highway was being prepared for something better, gravel. In other words they went from the dirt road to gravel. And then the paving.

And then, I came out here. I went back in '33. Picked up a car in Detroit. I drove out. And the first day from home, started about the same time. We passed through the town where we had stopped the second night four years earlier. And we drove another . . . . I don't know how many miles.

SJ: From Detroit instead of from Iowa . . . .

RB: But, ordinarily in those days on a dirt road 25 miles an hour was about your speed.

SJ: What time of year was it you were traveling in, in '29 and in '33?

RB: Well in '29 that was after our harvesting crops, and everything was in. That was the last of August, first of September. Right in there.

And then when I went back in '33, I think I left back there in July.

SJ: Now, the heavy rains might begin about mid-September, right, in that country?

RB: Yeah, well, they have rains there all the time. I know when we was goin' on those dirt roads we didn't stop and put chains on, and one day we was just slidin' all over the road, and everything there. And if you didn't have enough traction, why you kept driving anyway.

SJ: When you came out here in '29, did you stay the winter?

RB: We went down to L.A., Uncle Fred's. Stayed there about a week. Then came up to Petaluma. Stayed here a week-ten days, whatever. And we went back through Carson City, Reno. And, we stopped in Empori, Kansas.

SJ: The roads are still passable, then, when you were returning home.

RB: Oh yeah. The time we came out in '29, they had a flash flood in Colorada . . . . And being a dirt road that way, sometimes the water 'ould come down, and it may wash a gully eight or ten feet deep. Ten, fif' . . . . twenty feet wide. Out 'a your highway. And all they did, I guess they did it with mules, I don't think there was much traffic, bulldozers or anything. And they'd just float that down one side, and then up the other. That's so you'd go down there and up. Sometimes, there's still water flowing in there. Yeah.

SJ: Compound low.

RB: It was a crude situation.

Well, then, Uncle Leo from Petaluma came out. He had wanted me to stay when I was here in '29, and all. And then he kept after me to come out. And so, I said, well, I said, if I got a job, I'd come out and spend the winter.

SJ: What was Leo doing here, as far as his work?

RB: Well, he was working for Wilsey Bennett

[Wilsey , (comma) Bennett Company, Petaluma California, as early as 1923. Photo #295 in the Santa Rosa Public Library captioned "Men and women displaying Wilsey, Bennett Company eggs—1923."]

[Further research by one of my two mentors: Zelpha Wilsey: married Corliss, 2 children. Married Bennett, about 1930 (1930? See 1923 above), known as Zelpha Wilsey-Bennett, or was it Zelpha Wilsey Bennett? Did women use hyphenated names in those days? Big chicken ranch near Twin Bridges on Bodega Avenue. Bill Bennett, lives (1998) on the Wilsey-Bennett Ranch.]

SJ: Is that the chicken rancher down on Stony Point?

RB: Well, and then he was manager of the egg store in Petaluma. And they gathered eggs from, maybe, twenty different ranches. And then they processed 'em there, or what, candled 'em and everything of the kind, and then they were shipped to the City.

And then Wilsey had a commission house, butter and eggs, in San Francisco.

SJ: And was Wilsey Bennett the chicken rancher who was there on Stony Point?

RB: Well, that was the Wilsey Bennett Egg Store, or whatever he wanted to call it.

Yeah. It was a place where they gathered your eggs. And well, and then, whatever they, they would candle, grade everything out, and so forth. Then they'd prepare it for retail.

SJ: So, that's what Uncle Leo was doin'.

RANDY MOVES TO CALIFORNIA

RB: Yeah. Well, he wanted me to come out, then. Finally, I said, I would if I had a job. Two weeks after he got back, why he sent a date, or a letter, it was like a telegram there. And I was working at another place. And my Brother and Mother came up there and they told me about it. And I says, "Well tell him I'll be back there about next Wednesday. A week."

SJ: So, you were workin' off the farm.

RB: I was at that time. Yes. When we weren't busy. I did that from the time I was in high school. If my Dad didn't need me, I'd go and work for the neighbors, or something of that kind, for $2.00 a day. And that was my spending money.

So, anyhow, I came home. And Mother didn't want me to drive. I had a Whippet coupe.

SJ: Your very own?

RB: Oh, yeah. I had the first Model T when I was 16.

And I was gonna drive out. Aw, she insisted, you'll be drivin' day and night, and one thing and another, and, oh, made a lot of stories out of it. So I says, well, I'll go by train then.

And I left Fairfield, Iowa, there, about four o'clock in the afternoon. I got into Petaluma four days later (laughs). They stopped at every place. They didn't have a dining room car on the train. They stopped at everything, every place, picked up freight and different stuff that way, and back and forth. That was about the slowest trip you could ever expect.

Later, I went back in '40, on the Zephyr. And from Oakland into Chicaga, I think that was 39 hours.

Well, it didn't go. . . .it went north of Washington, our town there, by sixty-seventy miles. But I'd go to Cedar Rapids. Then they came there, and picked me up. Then, later I'd get off, and buy a ticket to Omaha, on the Zephyr. And then I'd take the Burlington Route

down there. And that was a fairly fast train. But then nothing like the Zephyr. That Zephyr, at times, one of the guys there, conductor or somebody I was talking with, said, "Making up time, they'd go a hundred, hundred and ten miles an hour."

SJ: Really. Wow.

RB: Yeah. If they were making up time, and he admitted where they were. Then, some of the states passed a law, 90 miles an hour was your limit. Yeah.

SJ: Diesel?

RB: Yeah. I think they were . . . . No, when I went out, that was steam. And (laughs) one morning, it was daylight, we stopped at a town, and I got out to walk up and down the platform, stretch my legs. And I noticed everybody looked at me, a little bit odd. I went back, went in the wash room. And I looked like a colored person. I had the window open. And that smoke came right back alongside the train. And I looked like I'd put on makeup for a colored person. (laughs)

SJ: The steam locomotion: What were they usin' for heat?

RB: Steam? Oh, that was all coal in those days. But that's, well, sometimes, and that smoke'd be comin' right back, see. Right alongside of the train. Had the window open. (laughs, heartily)

RANDY'S FIRST JOB HERE

SJ: So, you're out here in '31, and what's the job that was here for you?

RB: Well, then I went to work on that poultry ranch there.

SJ: Which poultry ranch?

RB: White Leghorn Farm.

SJ: And who owned White Leghorn Farms?

RB: Wilsey Bennett.

SJ: The same.

RB: See, he had a commission house in San Francisco, this egg store in Petaluma, and this ranch. When the Poultry Producers started in Petaluma, and all, he thought he was gonna be out of business unless he was producing his own. So, they sold the feed to the people, and took all the eggs. So, he and Casperson started a place over there, too, off of

Jewett Road, and what they figured eventually that they'd probably have a hundred thousand birds, or something on those. And he went in with, took this guy in as a partner, graduated from Davis, supposed to know all about poultry, and (pause) (interruption)

SJ: Go ahead. So, anyway, you were sayin' . . . . setup . . . .

RB: He started building one house after another, there, and everything. Wasn't doing too good with the chickens. Well, he flaked off a lot of the time. Had two or three men working there. And I guess he did very little of anything. And first thing you know, Wilsey was almost broke. So he gave him $2,500., I think, to buy up his contract.

He built those university-type houses. They never panned out. They was too much colds in the chicken. They'd get colds. And then your production was way off.

Anyhow then my Uncle went out there. Well, he didn't have any information, or knowledge about the laying stock. And so forth. But then he went out there, moved out there to oversee the others.

SJ: This is on Jewett Road?

RB: Well, Jewett is on the west side there. There's that 30-acre gum [eucalyptus] grove, in between there and Jewett.

RANDY MANAGING
WILSEY BENNETT'S
WHITE LEGHORN FARMS

So, then I came in, came along. After a year, or something like that, I took over as Manager. And he moved into town. And, well, (laughs) I had one man besides myself. And not always steady. When I left there, why, the had two married men in that place. Their wives was supposed to take care of the eggs. That would happen quite often, the ranchers that way. The women would clean and grade the eggs. And so forth. And then when it came time to clean houses, they thought they should have someone extreee. And Wilsey says, "Well, Randy didn't even have a man full time." But I put in, as I said, I started at 5:30 in the morning. And it'd be 6 (P.M.), then maybe, like in the summer, you'd close up all the house at night and you'd have to do that at eight or something of the kind. Go out and spend time on that, again. But, your hours didn't mean anything.

When I went back east then in '33, why, he said I had to grind and mix all the feed first. And have it for the three weeks or so that I was gone. And I worked as late as eleven o'clock, and started the next morning at four. (laughs) So, I was pretty well worn out. But we had that whole barn filled with mash there, and so forth. Yup.

That was, as I think I mentioned before, the last year I was there. That was the spring of '36 ['36 or '33?]. Then he sold his egg store in Petaluma. And we took our . . . . he had another guy picking up our eggs, had an egg store there. I think it was Lerner. And when it came time in the Spring for process . . . . for storage, why then I processed 'em. He didn't know to a certain degree. Pulled the chillers, the dividing pieces out of your case. They'd be all in the cases. They reach down there, and you could, a few dozen eggs in one hand, hold them in the oil two or three seconds, then take 'em out, and let 'em drain a few seconds.

But, I had to clean and grade 'em, and everything first.

SJ: Grading has to do with sizing and candling?

RB: Yup.

SJ: And do you dip 'em in oil?

RB: I didn't candle. But, being as they were processin' . . . . In other words, what causes an egg to deteriorate or lower the quality, is the size of that air cell. You know, at the top of an egg, if you boil 'em you have that.

Hold 'em in the oil 2 or 3 seconds. Then take 'em out, and let 'em drain that way. And I got to the place where I operated one in each hand. Three hundred sixty eggs went through there in eight minutes. But I had to clean and grade 'em everything first.

Well, there, by doing it within, say, at least 24 hours, that air cell was very small. And, I know Mr. Wilsey made the comment when they took them out the next Spring, er Summer, they tested out 87% specials . . . .

SJ: What was the purpose of the oil dipping?

RB: To seal the air pores and all so they didn't dry out.

SJ: I see. And these were eggs you say you were holding over the Winter, for the next Summer?

RB: Well, no. We'd have them in the Spring, when you'd have your top production then. They didn't put chicks in the year round this way. They's all at one time. And then you have that, well those pullets came in, you had a high production. And then later on, why, we didn't have the stock, and we didn't have the feed formulas. And they'd be way down. So, in the Summer, well I'd have maybe picked up as many as five thousand eggs a day there. Then in the Summer it'd, maybe, be a thousand, in the Summer months when it got hot. Yeah. So that's when they took 'em out of storage. They put 'em in storage down there, at 32 degrees in the Western Refrigeration Plant.

SJ: How long were they stored?

RB: They were stored from, say, March, April, until into the Summer, there, maybe 4-6 months.

And twice a week, why, I'd take the eggs in, haul 'em in, and put 'em in the cold storage there. Yeah. But they were processed as soon as possible. And that was a seal so that they didn't dry out. Oh, I don't know, now, as I say, with these case flats and everything of the kind, why, your production is more uniform the year-round. Yes, always year-round. So, there's no need for storage; I don't think they store any eggs anymore. But at that time, why, everyone did. That is, your egg stores. Casperson, Learner, and Nye and Nisson . . . .

SJ: What were those names, Casperson, Learner, and what?

RB: Nye and, Nye and Nisson.

Yeh. And I don't know, they probably was more of them, and everything; these are the ones I can remember now. And they all was in business, like he was in Petaluma, gathering eggs from the whole community, getting 'em ready, preparing 'em from here for retail. And then the big share of 'em were all hauled in to San Francisco.

SJ: How were the eggs transported? They were transported by truck into Petaluma. And then how were they transported from Petaluma to San Francisco?

RB: Well, that was by truck. Yeh. Wilsey had an old Dodge truck. I don't know how old it was. I think it was about a two-ton truck. And he went around the country. I think he picked them up every two or three days, as I remember. And, oh, we had what we called a tank house. We didn't have a pressure system. We had two redwood tanks, three stories high. They was twelve feet across and twelve feet high. And I think they was better than ten thousand gallons. And that's where we kept our eggs, there, and that was cooler, in that building. Yeah.

DISEASES IN CHICKENS

No, there's a lot of changes. Now there's no comparison. Disease. We didn't have any vaccine for bronchitis. What they had for pock . . . . if the bird wasn't very strong, they'd kill it. It was so severe. And I've actually tri poxed once, and I never did it again.

SJ: Why do you say once, but never again?

RB: Well, then we got . . . . about that time, they started bringin' in poultry and eggs from other places. And when they did that, they brought a lot of disease in with it. Yup.

SJ: Why do you say you vaccinated for pox once, but not again?

RB: Well, it was a regular chicken pock. And then later they used what they called a pigeon pock. It wasn't as severe. And now, I don't know if they still do it, the last, just about the last that I was there then, we vaccinated the chicken in the eye. Just a little dab on the eye, when you took 'em out of the box and put 'em in the brooder house, there. And that was for some respiratory disease. I've forgotten. It could have been bronchitis. But they've got more different diseases in there now. I don't know. I think now they vaccinate for about four or five, something like that.

CHICKEN FEED

SJ: But the diseases aren't there. And also the feed is better. So, feed combats disease, probably.

RB: Yeh. But, in the meantime, with these hybrids, well, for instance, like they started out on corns and all, seed corns. Pioneer was one of the first back there, in DeKalb. When you was back there in our days, we either had the old Read Yellow Dent . . . .

SJ: The what?

RB: Read Yellow Dent. It was a brand of corn. And some of those stalks would be two or three feet higher that the others. And all. Now you go back there, it's as level as though you'd a trimmed it all off. And the ears: they'd breed 'em so that the ears was a certain place, down on the stalk. And strong enough so that it doesn't fall out, because if they go through with a harvester, if they fall on the ground, they lose it, see?

SJ: Right.

RB: Yup. And they've made all those changes in that, and then that's when they went into the poultry, and everything, too. And, we've got much better breeding. Better formulas for feeds. And all of those things were . . . . I would say, very likely, the life of a hen would probably give just about double the production they did in the early days there, 50 years ago. And then most of the time they kept 'em 2 1/2, 3 years, somethin' like that.

MORE ON DISEASE

But by that time you had a certain mortality rate. And if you had a thousand in there, two or three years later maybe you was down to six or eight hundred, seven hundred, something like that. The mortality rate was pretty high, because we didn't have anything to fight this disease.

Like coccidiosis there, and all, all they did was feed 'em in 40% milk mash, dried milk, skim milk, flush them, then clean that all out, so that they didn't get it the second time. That's when it gave them the troubles. And now, well, that was our biggest loss. And with raising baby chicks.

SJ: Was what? Cocksiliosis(sic)?

[Coccidiosis, or coccidioidomyscosis, a disease of humans or domestic animals caused by fungus, chickens raised on litter and on the ground, marked by fever and pulmonary symptoms: Merriam-Webster and Roland C. Hartman]

RB: Cocksidiosis. So then, now, well, they've got different things, as far as that's concerned. In fact, you can put it in the feed, and raise those chicks, that'll never happen. But, when they're in the laying house a year later, maybe they'll get it. So, you should watch them. And when they get it, let it go for a day or two. And then hit it, and knock it out. Otherwise they'll never be immune.

Well, your losses in those days . . . . I figured that when I put in 7,500, I should have 3,000 good pullets, top pullets, more or less.

SJ: What was done with those birds who were not good layers? You say, out of 7,500, you'd have 3,000 good laying hens? So what would you be doin' with the other birds?

RB: Well, these were broilers, too. They wasn't sexing at that time. That came along while I was there.

Yeah. So, they'd be the broilers. As soon as they was a pound and a quarter to a pound and a half you'd kick them all out to make room for the pullets.

SJ: And they'd be slaughtered for meat.

RB: Yeah.

SJ: Broiler hens.

RB: Yeah. And, yeah, well, most of the time there, they raised one brood a year. They'd be in March. Yeah. I did put another one in later one time, but it didn't work out.

One time I scrubbed all the floors with lye. And I never paid much attention. But that was one of the best flocks of pullets I raised. And I realized afterwards it made a big difference. I killed a lot of those germs. They're in the floors, and everything of the kind.

Now they put something in the water; you can put it in the feed. What they'll do sometimes is, well, they'll feed 'em grain, whole grain, with the mash, your baby chicks, after they get a little size. And so forth. And then they use the grain as a balance. You cut that back, or give 'em more. If you give 'em more, then they won't get as much mash.

and the medication. So then that'll carry 'em, carry 'em through an immunization of the disease. But (laughs) one time during the Second World War I was workin' shipyard, had four or five hundred hens there, and all, and I bought . . . .

SJ: Now, you're talking now about your own hens on your own 8 acres.

RB: Yeh. And I bought 'em from a dealer. Oh, they was the most beautiful birds you ever wanted to see. Layin' 70% production. And I was gettin' a pile of eggs there. Few days later, well, their whole necks would twist, and one thing another. Newcastle, I believe it was.

SJ: Newcastle disease?

[the other prevalent disease, attacks both chicks and adult birds, a destructive virus disease of birds and especially domestic fowl which involves respiratory and nervous systems, involving paralysis, epilepsy, distortions of the neck, etc., egg production drops to practically nothing, no means of protection until 1948 and 1952 introduction of love virus vaccines: Merriam-Webster and Roland C. Hartman]

RB: The guy had separate houses, undoubtedly. He got it in a couple houses, so he sells the ones over here, and they didn't catch it. You know, it would take a while to transmit. So I got those. It was really a loss, taking it. Most of the time I raised my own chicks. And, well, then, in '45 I built that brooder house.

RANDY'S WIFE AND FAMILY
MARRIAGE 1935
CHARLES 1937
KELLEY 1944

SJ: Let's backtrack a little bit, Randy.

RB: Yeah.

SJ: Let's see. In '31 you were workin' there for the White Leghorn Farms, and you worked there 'til '37, right?

RB: Yeah.

SJ: Now, meanwhile, speak a little bit, please, about your meeting your wife and your marriage and your children. And then speak about your purchase of 8028 Gravenstein Hwy in 1941.

RB: Right.

SJ: And then let's get back to the working for Taylor Milling. But, first, a little bit about your family?

RB: Well, I was there . . . . we was married at the end of '35, December. And other than that . . .

SJ: Your wife's name?

RB: Frances Kelly. Other than that, I lived in the big house there.

SJ: Which big house?

RB: Oh, the ranch there.

SJ: Where you were working.

RB: The White Leghorn Farms.

And, I'd have a hired man, a married man, and they got their house rent-free, for boarding me. Then I got $75. a month. And if you figured the number of hours, (laughs heartily) Someday when I have a little time, it's a rainy day, I'm gonna figure that out.

SJ: So, you were married in '35. And Charley (Charles), your son, came along in '37. And Bo, (Kelly) whose name is Randolph Kelly Bureker, Bo came along in '41.

RB: '44.

SJ: So, he's 7 years younger than Charles?

RB: Almost, yeah.

SJ: So let's get back to the employment then, and come back to your own purchase of property. But, then, what caused you to leave the White Leghorn Farms in '37? And go to work for Taylor Milling?

RB: Yeah. Well, Frances was teaching at Liberty School.

Just a half a mile or so across the gardens, there, from me. And so forth. And, that's when I got acquainted with . . . . a guy that I was working with there . . . . had a youngster who wasn't in school, but he went to the meetings there. And so forth. That's where we became acquainted.

SJ: What grades was Frances teaching?

RB: She was teaching the lower grades. They had two teachers. I don't know whether it was up to the sixth or the eighth grade. I think she taught the lower four grades.

SJ: So, basically, it's what you'd call a two-room schoolhouse, then, right?

RB: Yeah. There's Liberty School.

Yeah. Then, when Charley was born, and all, naturally, she stayed out for, I guess it was a year. Then she went to Gold Ridge. Sebastopol. On the Bloomfield Road. Now it's converted into a home. And then they built a big school . . . . This was a two-room school at that time. And the teacher there before, they had a few kids in there that was a little bit unruly, and all, and they closed it as soon as they reached the minimum days. And so forth. They wanted someone to go up there, and, well, she restored order. And there was some of those lads in there that was a little bit on the rough side. Yeah. And, well, then she quit again.

And then, afterwards, after Bo was born, why, then finally they asked her to do a little substituting at different times. They asked here to come back to Petaluma. And she taught there then, until she retired. She retired around '68. I wouldn't be sure.

SJ: Workin' for Petaluma Schools.

RB: Yes she taught at the McNear School. And there she taught the second grade. Yeah. The second grade. Hazel Tingelly taught first.

[Randy and Frances separated somewhere around this time. Whatever went on it was hard on Randy emotionally, and he always, with me, avoided talking about Frances and the marriage. I remember her as a customer of Exchange Bank, when they were married and together.

I worked for Exchange Bank for 12 years, including 1963-64 in Cotati as Assistant Manager to Jim Harris and then again from 1967-74 as Manager of the branch.

I do recall that after Randy and Frances were no longer living together, he told me they used to travel separately to see their sons and wives and grandchildren. It seemed not right to be traveling to the same place separately, so they teamed up for these trips together.]

THE FAMILY HOME RANCH
1941

SJ: Tell me, please, about the purchase of your property on Gravenstein Highway.

RB: Well, (laughs) I decided I wanted to buy a home. I almost bought . . . ., in fact, the wife and her father each bought a lot in the years before we were married. He opened a subdivision. Baker Court, I think they called it, off Mountain View, in the south end of town (Petaluma).

They bought the two lots right at the top. And we was thinking one time of building up there. I went down to Camm and Hedges lumber yard.

And I got a book on plans. Well in those days everything was compressed, awfully small. So I took the thing home. We finally found a pattern we liked, more or less. And I drew out a floor plan. And I increased the size of several rooms, but kept the plan more or less the same.

And so the next night I went back down there, after work, and took it to Camm there, and showed him, and I says, "Can you figure out my floor plan?" "Oh yeh," he says. "That's easy to figure out." "But," he says, "you increased the number of square feet. A house like that would cost you up to $4,000."

The guy next to us in Petaluma built a two-bedroom house, nothing fancy, two-car garage, cement floor and everything, for $3,250. Yeah. That was, I think, about '31 or '32.

It's a time or two I had a carpenter come out to the ranch, there, to do something. Two dollars and a half a day. Yeah.

SJ: Speakin' of how much a day, you were tellin' me earlier about, the reason that you didn't return back to Iowa once you were here, because of the conditions there and the conditions here . . . . the wages; maybe you could explain that again.

RB: Well, the conditions there were worse <u>earlier</u> than here, see. That was the biggest difference. And then after being here for a year, two years, well, I stayed here for over five. Then it was a little bit difficult to go back. And then I went back in '40.

My Brother hauled a truck load of hogs into Peoria, Illinois. When he paid the trucking bill, and all, he had less than $100. for the whole truck load of hogs. Dad sold cows, over twelve hundred pounds each. Three of 'em. He got $59. Just a little under $20. for a twelve hundred pound animal.

So, you didn't feel like going back into something like that.

SJ; You were sayin' also you were makin' how much here, and your father could pay, hire a man for how much back in Iowa?

RB: Well, at that time when, after I took over here, why, I was gettin' $75. a month. So, that was a lot better.

SJ: And your dad would hire somebody for how much back in Iowa?

RB: Well, he didn't hire anyone. He and my Brother took it over. But it pushed 'em a little bit harder, and everything of that kind. And then, too, before he rented that I worked out for wages. Forty five and fifty dollars a month.

And I had room and board, with it, see. I had all of that, right with it, yeah.

SJ: Right. But while you were makin' $75. a month here, in a managing position, you were saying your dad could hire someone to work on the farm back there for $1.00 a day, right?

So, then, let's go back to Gravenstein. So, you, you have these plans. Were these to build a house on Baker Court?

RB: Yeah.

SJ: Did you do that?

RB: No. No, they went back down on that. And then I was gonna buy a place on Elysian Way. I started lookin' for a little country place. And then the wife was goin' up to Gold Ridge there one day, and she saw a for sale sign there on that place. Went in. So, in the end, we went out there, and we bought the 8028 Gravenstein Highway.

The house was already there. Reimer had been there, I'm sure he said, for 32 years. But the house wasn't completed; people were living in it. But he says there was a lot of finish work that had to be done yet. And so that house must have been built around 1910, Somewhere in there. Yeah. I think it and myself was about the same age (laughs). We grow old together.

SJ: Right. Were any of the barns there when you moved?

RB: Well, there was the one, that one chicken house, he built, the one where you have your cars.

Reimer built that just about 4 or 5 years before I bought it. He inspected every piece of lumber. If it had a knot in it, it went back. And he kept chickens in it for one year.

And then he quit . . . . the chicken business. I don't know whether he had chickens before. And then he had sheep on the place. He had about 50 head of ewes there, and a buck, and he ran lambs, and so forth.

And well, when I came out there in those days everyone had to have a cow for your own milk (laughs lightly). So I think a week afterward I got a cow and a calf there. And I just had a calf, and so forth. Then I raised another calf, a heifer calf. It was more milk than we could use, by far. And so on. And then a neighbor had a cow for sale there. Two neighbors. I bought them. And then, first thing you know, I had four cows I was milking. I sold the milk to the (Petaluma) Cooperative Creamery. I was intending to get a separator, only you couldn't buy it, [WW II] and separate the skim milk and milk. For any animal or poultry, it's one of the best foods you can give them.

SJ: Skim milk.

RB: Yeah. So, well, you wouldn't give them the whole milk. And, so that's what I wanted.

And they said, no they didn't want the cream or anything. They wanted the whole milk. So, then I set the cans alongside the road, there, before I went to work. And they picked 'em up.

SJ: You bought the place in '41. Right?

RB: Right. Yeah.

SJ: So at that time, you were married 6 years, and your son Charley was 4 years old. And then Bo was born there in '44.

WORKING FOR TAYLOR MILLING
SELLING CHICKEN AND DAIRY FEEDS
TO THE RANCHERS
1937-39

So back to your employment, Randy, you worked 'til '37 for White Leghorn Farms. And then '37 to '39 you worked for Taylor Milling, on the road selling, right?

RB: Right.

SJ: So, would you speak about that, please?

RB: Well, as I told you before, I think, that was a wholesale company. They had to go through dealers. It wasn't the easiest selling, because the dealer, naturally, wanted to feel that he sells his own feed. And their commission wasn't very big handling someone

else's. So, it was a little bit difficult. We had a year when things was down. And our tonnage fell off, there for that district, and all. And I and one of the other salesmen, and I think and the manager, all three of us was out that year.

SJ: But, meanwhile, you said that was a superior quality of feed.

RB: Well, I think it was a top quality. I wouldn't say superior.

Any feed can make a big difference. For instance I sold feed to a guy. He had a little hatchery, and his brother had a big one. The brother was short on eggs, so he gave him some of his eggs. When he came in there, when he came out of the incubator, he was gradin' them. He wanted to know where those chicks came from. He said they were so firm and solid, compared to the rest.

And when I sold the reds to the Penngrove Hatchery, one of the guys, he didn't want to buy any meat birds except from my place and one of the other guys. And he did it very scientifically. He'd weigh chicks when they came in, and weighed them when they went out, and everything, and he balanced that out. And undoubtedly mine, and, well, what I used, the feed that I used there had manamar in, which is made out of kelp. And there's some ingredients, undoubtedly, in there that you don't get too many other places. Or something. And this fellow, well, he made the statement, he said . . . . (interruption for tape change)

SJ: So, you were saying that this top quality feed was producing better. And you were working selling it, and the company was Taylor? What was it called, Taylor what?

RB: Yeah. Taylor Milling. No, it was a more expensive, and I think it was a little bit superior to most of them. They used exceptionally good ingredients. There on the ranch, I ground the grains, and mixed my own mash. We had our hammer mill, for Wilsey.

And I mixed all the mashes there. And one time, some guy came down there, and for building up the protein they used quite a little fish meal. He got a chance to buy five ton. Well, that lasted for months.

SJ: Five ton of what?

RB: Fish meal.

SJ: From Taylor Milling?

RB: No, from someone else. So, he sent that up there.

And, well, he used to come up every Friday or Saturday, stay in that other house there. And we didn't have any use for another tenant house.

Anyhow, he says what about it. And I says, well if you'd a paid for it, and dumped it in the Bay, we'd a been money ahead. It's a poor quality. My production has gone down. He never bought any more from that lady. It was an off grade. He didn't know enough about it, or anything of the kind. And that's what happened. Production was way off on it.

SJ: So you worked, Randy, for two years for Taylor. And then it sounded like that operation kinda folded up here, with three of you. The Taylor operation up here in Petaluma kinda folded?

RB: No, they didn't fold, but they cut way back. They cut, I think that the warehouse went for a while yet, and all. I don't know when they did close it.

It was right where you cross the D Street bridge, on the left-hand side there, right on the water. And I don't know when they did close it. But, it was, well, those things happen. It was, your poultry business, every now and then you'd have a good year, and then bad, back and forth that way. Whereas, as I said, with the dairy business, that was more steady and dependable.

WORKING FOR GLOBE MILLS
CONSUMER FEED STORE
DRIVING TRUCK
HAULING FEED
1939-40

SJ: So, in '39 you went to work for Globe Mills.

RB: Yeah.

SJ: Out of San Francisco. Driving a truck. And was that the kind (Randy coughs, twice). . . .

RB: Well, I was drivin' for the feed store here in Petaluma. It was called Consumer Feed Store.

SJ: You were drivin' truck, delivering chicken feed.

RB: Chicken feed, and dairy feeds.

SJ: Both.

RB: Yup. Yeah, all of your feed stores have poultry and dairy.

SJ: So, speak about that, then, what your experiences there for the four years. [no, two years, until WWII preparations]

RB: Well, at that time, the union was a little bit rough. I had to be union, too or they wouldn't load me. And went somewhere. And so forth. I had quite a job there. And they didn't want to give me a job. After I had the job, I had to get clearance from the union. And, so then I finally told the guy, I said, well, it's only part-time, likely. And the rest of the time the boss wants me to be out on the road selling, because I've sold before. So they finally gave me the permit. And then I joined the union. I don't know, it was a while later.

SJ: It was probably the Teamsters Union?

RB: Yeah, the Teamsters. Yeah. They didn't . . . . And then the Warehousemen were the other union. C.U.I. A.F. L., wasn't it?

SJ: Well, A.F.L.-C.I.O., that was the big umbrella.

RB: Yeah, that was the A.F.L.-C.I.O. That was the other union, and they was warehouse. So, when I went there. . . . then later they combined, some way. But I wasn't supposed to go in an unloaded railroad car, or anything. Well, I did, regardless, as far as that's concerned. And all. But I wasn't supposed to work in there. That was another union. But a small place like that, you had to go along with it. Then later it was combined in some way. I don't know just what it was. And it was OK there. No, I loaded railroad cars there.

SJ: So, you spent those four years driving, loading, unloading. . . .

RB: Yup.

SJ: Selling, as you were on the road?

RB: Well, I didn't do any actual selling. I did pick up a few customers, people that I knew. And so forth. But, then, I never actually went out as a salesman. We had another guy who did that. And he had a pickup, supposed to make (?scrolls?) at every. . . . But that would be a little different story.

NERVE-WRACKING
UNSAFE
TRUCK DRIVING

SJ: What size of truck were you driving to deliver?

RB: Well, I think they rated it a ton and a half. But I hauled up to 7, 8 ton.

SJ: Six wheel?

RB: Ah, yeah. And the one thing about that truck, I told the boss, if I was ever loaded and got in a brake test, they'd rule it off the highway. It didn't have adequate brakes, by anything. And you go into the city, or something of that kind, in fact, by the time you came there, you was a wreck. I had to come down the Waldo approach in low gear.

The first time I went into the City, with a load on, topped the Waldo Grade, dropped into high gear, why I came out of that tunnel, I was driving close to sixty miles an hour. And I braced up, and put my foot on the brake, and everything I had . . . . you couldn't phase it. I was in the middle of the bridge, and then I dropped the thing back into the gears so I didn't go through the pay station.

And that's the way it is. And I, well I says, it's been runnin' . . . . he wouldn't do anything.

SJ; What were you carrying into San Francisco?

RB: Well, he had some stuff that he bought up here, and we took back to their mill down there. And then I'd pick up a load from the mill, and come out. And one time, it was during the war, well, I had a route that I had to go down there, and that was military zoned.

SJ: Carrying what?

RB: Well, that time I had a load on. I don't know what was on there, it was grains of some nature. (Coughs) They brought me over some of those high hills. I had it in the lowest gear. And I was down to 2 miles an hour. I was looking for a brick building or something because the brakes couldn't hold it. And then when I got down there they told me at the mill, there, I could go along the railroad track, there, a little ways, and get out of it. So. I didn't need to drive over that again. But actually, I was thinking of a brick building or something to slide into. It was just . . . .

In the lowest gear, and I was down to 2 miles an hour, and I didn't know if they was going to come up on me.

And those steep hills there. You know what they are. And then that big truck, loading.

Aw, I wouldn't do that again for anything.

FEED MIXES

SJ: Randy, the mills were in Petaluma. The feed was being mixed in Petaluma, right?

RB: Well, we had a little, no, most of the feeds were all mixed and everything. They were ready for retail; they'd ship 'em up in cars.

SJ: They were mixed where, in San Francisco?

RB: Yeah, at the mill there. Now, we had a little feed mixer down there. No grinder. But a little feed mixer. Someone wanted a little special mixture, or something, they'd. . . .

SJ: Right.

RB: Well, we had one guy, a dairyman, up in Alexander Valley. He had a special mix, he wanted, of his own, always. And Monday was always a pretty busy day. I said a milk route down in Novata [Novato]. So many stops, and everything of the kind. And Friday, this guy called, five ton of dairy feed Monday morning. So Saturday afternoon I went down there, and mixed the five tons. The place was closed. We just unlocked it, and mixed the five ton.

So I could get out, and get goin'.

SJ: So, you were bringin' already-mixed feeds up from San Francisco?

RB: But most of the feed, well, 95% of it, was mixed in the city.

SJ: San Francisco. 95% of it. Weren't these mills like Golden Eagle, and which other mills?, Behrens and Nelson [Hunt and Behrens], weren't those mills goin' in Petaluma at that time?

THE McNEAR FAMILY

RB: Oh, yeah. They was goin' along in the 20's and all. I don't know when they started. Vonson was there for an awful long (time). I think, very likely, McNear was one of the oldest. They, (?Ben?) or George P., Senior, was 90 or 91 years old, I think, when he passed away. And his father and uncle were in the business before. And they ground flour with a stone. Stone grind. And I think that's the reason they owned a lot of property around there. They came there. They was one of the first families that ever came into Petaluma. Yeah.

No, I will say, they were conservative, Scotch. If you owed 'em a nickel, they'd walk a mile to collect it. But they'd walk that mile to give you a nickel if they made a mistake.

No, I never saw anyone like that. I remember one of the women worked for a gentleman there. She said, "I thought I was honest before I came here" (laughs). No, they were very, very strict on everything that way.

FEED MIXES

SJ: So, Randy they were mixin' feeds here, back into the 20's. And yet you said 95% of the feed was comin' out of San Francisco?

RB: Oh, yeah. . . .

SJ: Really?

RB: . . . . 95% of the mixed feed. It was only occasionally that I mixed a special mix here. I had that one dairy, and then it was one or two others maybe a little amount here and there. Other than that, no, it was all mixed in the city.

SJ: But do you mean 95% for your company? Or 95% of all the feeds?

RB: All the feeds that we sold.

SJ: Just your company?

RB: Yeah.

SJ: But not 95% of all the feeds that were being fed in Petaluma?

RB: Oh, no.

SJ: No. That's what I was confused about.

RB: Yeah, yeah.

Now, you take Golden Eagle. McNear's. Hunt & Behren's. They've all had their own. . . .Vonson's . . . . mixes and everything of that kind. And Poultry Producers. They had a continuous mixer. They just poured a certain amount in. But now and then if there was a mouse nest or something got in there, or something clogged, your ingredients was off. We never did that. We, our mixtures at McNear's, they were 2500 pounds to a mix. Or approximately that. Sometimes they'd vary a little bit, but then that was the big share of it.

SJ: We're talkin' about McNear now. You went to work for McNear in 1950, and worked for them for quite a long while, until about '63, when they were called Golden Eagle at that time.

RB: Well, now, I went to work there in '47

1940-42
WORLD WAR II
BASALT SHIPYARD
IN NAPA

SJ: OK. And just so we don't loose continuity with time and history, along came World War II, and you left Globe Mills, and you went to work for the Basalt Shipyard in Napa, right?

RB: Right.

SJ: Would you speak about that, why you had to do that? Why you left the chicken feed business?

RB: Well. By that time they was runnin' me ragged. I mean, so much work. And one thing and another. For $30 a week. So, I could make more over there [at the shipyard]. Another thing, I figured that very likely I was goin' to be drafted, or something. And I thought, well, if I did, I'd like to go in the Seebees, or something of that nature. So. I wanted a trade from that.

SJ: But about the wartime, you were about 31 years old, or so. Were they drafting people at that age?

RB: No, I was 30. Well, you see, that was 1940.

And I went in there as a pipe fitter. One of my customers, that I used to deliver to as a trucker, he had a brother-in-law. He was working, I think, at Mare Island.

And so forth, but . . . . At that time, I very seldom ever stopped more than 15 minutes for lunch. As I said, the boss marked eight hours . . . . I mean . . . .

SJ: That is, for the feed company.

RB: That was before we had the freeway. It was all a two-lane highway goin' through Vacaville, Dixon, all of those, you went through all those little towns. I'd get the truck out, and go over there, and be at the Globe Mills, in Sacramenta, at eight o'clock.

So, I'd be out there two hours or more ahead of time. And I never got paid for that.

And then he bought quite a lot of wheat from a guy over around Vallejo, over in there somewhere, one time. And the guy says, well, if you're here at eight o'clock, that's when we leave the house, we'll load you. Otherwise you load yourself. So, naturally, those

wheat sacks at a hundred thirty pounds, I'd go down, take the truck over, lock up, be over there at eight, or before eight, always. Bring a truckload of wheat in. Some of the time he took it right out to the ranchers, if he had it sold. Otherwise, I'd load it, and then I did my day's work from there on out. So, I didn't waste any time.

SJ: But this fellow clocked you in for eight hours, no matter how many hours you worked. And told you that there were other people waitin' for the job if you didn't want it?

RB: Yup.

I was at the shipyard for 3 or 4 months. I took a day off for something. And I went in, ordered some feed. I had chickens, and, as I say, the cows there. Old boss saw me, and his old face flushed up. And he said, "You was a damn sight more important than workin' in a shipyard, where they just set around and loaf all the time."

SJ: Sure.

RB: I had two weeks, we didn't have blueprints. Other that that, I worked as hard in the shipyard as I did anyplace, I think. Sure, a lot of them didn't. You get by with it.

But anyhow he had six truck drivers in eight months after I left. No one would do it. And they had to be union. But he just disliked the union. And gave me a raise, the union got a raise. I got the raise six months after the rest of 'em did. (laughs) He pulled every angle.

SJ: So, you're workin' in Napa, for Basalt Shipyard, as a pipe fitter, about 2 years.

SHIPBUILDING
AT
MARINSHIP
SAUSALITO
1942-45

And then you went to work for Marinship, Sausalito, ship building. And that was, as I've learned, that company was built from scratch by Bechtel [no, Kaiser], and operated by Bechtel [Kaiser] . . . .

RB: I think so.

SJ: . . . . buildin' ships.

RB: Yeah.

SJ: Liberty ships.

RB: Yeah. I think they were tankers.

SJ: And you weren't there very long before the war ended.

RB: (laughing, chuckling) I was always the person curious on everything.

We was on Basalt there. We had to have pipes bent, small 2" pipe we used for hydraulic. We'd bend it. The other pipe, well, up to five inch, they had a machine, with a power arm on there to bend it. And I watched 'em operate that all the time. I was always curious.

So I went down to Marinship (laughs). The guy gave me a print, turned me loose with a helper. He came in the same day, and here I'd have 3" pipe bent. I was lost. I didn't know where to go or what or anything. Went up on the ways, and here's a machine, just like we had down at Basalt. And I poked the buttons; it operated, and had electricity on it. And I'd bend the pipe (laughs), put it in, and everything (laughs). Foreman never came around 'til that night. He couldn't believe it. I wasn't even supposed to do anything like that. You was supposed to take it to the pipe shop, draw a diagram or a blueprint of it, do what you wanted, and then come back a day or two later. Sure. What was you going to do in the meantime?

We had one guy down at Basalt, a good pipe fitter. He stood around that pipe shop until . . . . I think we was putting out a ship about every 28 days there at one time; he'd be standing around there about 20 of those days. And he did his work. But, they never gave me that opportunity.

We started in making minelayers. Well, I took a job on, on those, still had to get my work done in 28 days on the others. And they milked it in on me a little bit. That's what burned me up. Reason I left. No, I was willing. I will say they didn't force you. But, when there's a chance for advancement, the foreman gave it to a guy that never handled anything but half- and three-quarter inch pipe. And one helper. At one time I was running eight men under me. (laughs) So I told him he gave me the shitty end of the stick. And I didn't like it.

SJ: This was Basalt?

RB: That's when I left them.

SJ: So you left Basalt, went to work for Marinship. Left Marinship because the war was over. Right?

RB: Yeah, I was there when the . . . . I remember the rumor went through the yard there . . . . I think that was about the time Roosevelt died, wasn't it? . . . .

SJ: Forty five. He died before the war ended, just before the war ended. (April 12, 1945) War ended in May . . . . (in Europe, May 7, 1945)

RB: I think, I thought I was at Bay. . . . at Marinship when he passed away.

SJ: It stands to reason. The dates I have down here may not be exact dates.

RB: Some of them are a little bit . . . . maybe I bounced around a bit.

SJ: Well, not only that, you and I were talkin' about dates, and I was, sometimes, you'd say two years, three years, and I'd write down the particular year. But in any event, so you leave the shipyards.

PUMP WORK
FOR
S. A. PETERSON
WELL DRILLING AND PUMPS
PETALUMA
1945-47

And you went to work for S. A. Petersen Well Drilling and Pumps [Sardis A. Peterson, well borer, 22 3rd Street, Petaluma].

RB: Well, I was there, it must have been about three years.

Because I went from there to McNear's.

SJ: Let's go the McNear's. Since we're mainly talkin' about the chicken and egg business . . . .

But you worked for this Peterson, whose not related to Les Petersen.

RB: No.

SJ: You worked for him, workin' on pumps, and some plumbing work. And then you say you had a leg injury. So, let's get to the point, then, of workin' for McNear, which you did for 15, 16, 17 years.

RB: Well, he had three drilling rigs, and put in new pumps, and repaired others and everything. And then he had a couple men working on plumbing. And sometimes I went on plumbing, but not very often, much of the time. Big end of the time I was on pump work, and then sometimes I worked as a helper on the rigs in the winter when work was slack. In the winter your pump work is down. You see, people use. . . . a lot of your pumps just for irrigating.

We had a well we cleaned out, at Geyserville. It was only sixty foot deep, about 30" across, and it was just cut like a sieve. The water rushed in there; a 60 horse (horsepower) motor on it. And that would shoot out of a 5" discharge, about 5-6' there, just great. It was throwin' out over 300 gallons a minute.

SJ: Just a sixty foot deep well.

RB: You'd hear that water rushin' in there. It sounded like a waterfall.

SJ: Where was it, right next to the river?

RB: It wasn't very far from the Russian River.

SJ: Sandy soil?

RB: Well, we, I didn't really know what the soil was, and everything. We didn't drill it. The well was there. And all we did was take the pump out, and thrash it out there, some of the perforations probably got clogged. He says it wasn't getting anywhere near the water it should 'a had. So we worked that out, put the pump back, started it up. Nah, it was running 300 gallons a minute probably, out there, without any trouble. Yeah.

RANDY INJURES HIS LEG

SJ: How did you injure your leg? How did you injure your leg workin' for Peterson.

RB: Oh. It happened at home. My well went haywire. The casing rusted out. Filled up with dirt. That was when I was workin' for Sard (Peterson) there.

I had a trailer. I didn't have any pickup, or anything of the kind. And I had to go over to a neighbor's there. I had 3 or 4 barrels I filled with water. And I had the chickens and the cows, from the house I had to haul water. And in front of the chicken house, I left it there. I took the car away. And I had it on a fruit box, the tongue (trailer tongue) of it.

I don't know, somehow or other, I guess I was right alongside the porch there. And I guess I dipped the water out of the truck barrels. And I was standin' in the back, later, and all at once that trailer tipped back, and I got that knee between two barrels of water. It was black six inches up and down both sides of my knee, there, absolutely black.

SJ: That's your right knee?.

RB: That's when I, then I couldn't get down on my knee for plumbing or anything.

SJ: How long did that knee injury affect you?

RANDY WENT TO WORK
FOR McNEAR
OFFICE WORK
THEN
SELLING FEEDS TO THE RANCHERS
1947-63

RB: Well, I went to work for McNear's then, as far as that's concerned. As I said, I worked there in front of the (?regional?) office six months. In the end, it wasn't too bad after a while.

But it wasn't anything like the length of time that this damn thing is.

SJ: Your present leg problem?

RB: Maybe I was younger then. (smile)

SJ: A little. (smile) Not much. So you went to work for McNear in '47, worked in the front office, retail salesman about 6 months, then outside salesman for about 16 years. And you said your area was Novato, Sonoma, Penngrove, Cotati.

RB: Yeah. Well, and then later Golden Eagles took over, why, maybe it was before that, one of our old salesmen there, he retired, and so forth. And then I used to go up as far as Healdsburg there, in the last several months. Yeah. Santa Rosa and Healdsburg. Well, we always had a definite area for where we went. If you had a friend there, in that area, fine and dandy.

Other than that, we stayed in our areas. And you didn't duplicate all that travelling.

If I went to Novata, Sonoma, I'd spend a day. And then I never went back 'til the next week. I didn't call on everybody every week, but only some of the bigger comp. . . ., big customers. But then, other than that, some of 'em you, every two weeks, sometimes it was four. Maybe they got 50 hens out there, and all. Well, they'd order enough for a month at a time.

That got to the place where the wages got so much higher for the truck drivers, and everything of the kind, why, they had to cut a lot of that out. They would charge something like a nickel a sack for delivery, or something, depends on how far out you was.

No, they gave everybody a pretty good break.

SJ: McNear's?

RB: Yeah.

SJ: You mean a good break? You mean a decent price on their feed?

RB: Well, I recall one time. The boss came in. He had a sample of wheat. Saturday night, or Friday, we was in there. And he says, "It's over by Benecia. I made a bid on it. And the guy, he didn't know what he'd take it or not."

He (the boss) says, "If we get it, he can sell it for four twenty five a hundred ($4.25 a hundred pounds)." And I thought, "Well, if we sold it, moved the truck right out to the ranch, see, didn't unload it at our place or anything, had him take it out."

I went out. I sold two truck and trailer loads, with the provision if we got it.

We never heard anything. The guy went to New York, or something, and was gone for 10 days, or something.

(The shipment of wheat) came in. And we sent it out.

A week later, well, there was my little Japanese Otamura. He says, "What did you sell that for?" I says, "four, twenty five." He says, "They billed me for four, twenty two and a half."

Another guy, well, if they can knock two and a half, he wanted another two and a half. He came in there, and he was going to argue it down more.

So, I jumped the boss on it. I says, "What happened?" I said "You said four, twenty five."

He said, "They didn't charge me as much for hauling. So I passed it on to the rancher."

SJ: And Otamuras noticed it, and were thankful. And the other guy was trying to beat the deal more?

RB: Yup. But that's the way the company was.

I had one guy, one time, a dairyman, has a nice big account, paid it, at the end of the month, and he says, "How much did I get off of your regular list price?" I says, "I don't know. I've never taken any break on that."

So I asked the boss. He says "Its the same for everyone." He says, "That guy that's a big guy, at one time was a little man, so we treat 'em all alike."

SJ: (laughs) great. great. (pause) Tell some more stories, about McNear. And, also, at this time, the chicken business is in a real decline, I think. You were workin' there up 'til '63. So you might speak to some of the demise of the chicken and egg business. Course, you were sellin' . . . .

RB: By that time, they was a lot of these big cage plants in operation.

SJ: Big meanin' how many birds?

RB: Well, hundred thousand, seventy five thousand would be a small one. I think Tennyson over there on Roberts Road, he had seventy five, and then, up, well, there was several of 'em, up there a hundred thousand.

SJ: There were several in Windsor, I remember, in those times.

RB: Yeh. And there was one of them up off of Olivet Road there. Well, we had that, Golden Eagle had that account. We had a tremendously hot day there one time, and all. They took hoses and everything up there, tried to hose the ground, wet it down there so it'd be cooler.

SJ: The hot summer was the summer of '61. That's the summer we moved here. That's when the chickens were dyin' all over the place.

RB: Yeah. Anyhow, it was a long (?) then. Those guys had picked them up, leghorns that way. Well, we always had a barrel. You know, you dropped them in there. And he'd come around and pick them up, I think, once a week or twice a week.

SJ: Do what with 'em?

RB: Well, there was a guy, just did that. We paid him so much. He hauled 'em down to, I think, Cader there.

SJ: Art Cader?

RB: Yeah. [Art Cader's dad, Cader Bros., one of whom was Art Cader's dad] There on, East, well, in East Petaluma down in there, on Lakeville Road. And they, I think they ground them up, dehydrated, and well, even the feathers was a lot of protein then. And (laughs) probably went back into chicken feed again. Dehydrated. Run through a processing.

SJ: So, chickens eatin' chickens, huh?

RB: I wouldn't be surprised, about how some of it was. It'd be more likely it'd be for a hog feed, though, and all.

Yeah. No. Well, you take your cattle, in the pastures, they don't like to eat around their own manure. But chickens, there's more calcium and so forth in there, and they really like that. I cleaned out a chicken house out one time, they had peat moss in there, oh, the manure was so terrible there. Later, I thought I must have put too much on the ground, and burned it. Then one day I was coming out of the barn there, and turned the cattle out, in the Spring, the grass was a nice height and everything. You go over in that spot, and

here it was almost like a lawn. Those cattle, I noticed 'em, walked right around out there, and never put their heads down once. And they went over there to eat. And I watched. They stayed there just about the whole day.

SJ: This is where the chicken manure was spread?

RB: Yeah.

SJ: Where you spread chicken manure, and the grass was rich.

RB: Yeah.

Another time I covered the place with a commercial fertilizer, and I had a couple buckets left. So, and I went diagonal to that oak tree back of your place (referring to Randy's old chicken building which I am renting) there, from there down to the shop. That Summer, when the grass dried up, that was eaten down to the ground. The rest of it was all dry around there, and that was doubled, see, amount.

Now, any commercial fertilizer or poultry manure they really go for. Yeah. But their own manure, that's the reason you see, lots of times, out in the pastures, and all, that ground, high turf of grass there. That's where there's cattle manure in there, and they just leave the grass around it. (pause) Yeah.

DECLINE AND EVENTUAL DEMISE OF THE LOCAL CHICKEN AND EGG INDUSTRY

SJ: So, tell me some more stories about the McNear experience, and also about the decline of the chicken and egg industry.

RB: Well, today, the industry isn't anything like it was when I left it there. As I say, at that time the cage plants was just coming in. And I don't know what it is now, but, here, a few years ago, well, this one lady, her daughter operates a place. We was paying around 90 cents a dozen for eggs, and she said that her daughter was only gettin' 67 cents from the ranch. I won't get to Petaluma there, why, the difference from the ranch price, I think, was about 4 cents. But everything has changed. They have to have bigger margins, and all. (pause) Yup.

No, I think I mentioned it before: I think it was in '32, for just a couple of weeks or months maybe, the ranch price for eggs was eleven cents a dozen. It was down that low. I can remember my mother telling about one time they sold eggs for twelve cents a dozen. Well, this time (laughs) they were lower than that. And that was goin' way back when. Yup.

SJ: Any more McNear stories, or shall we finish up with the rest of your workin' experience?

RB: Well, I don't think there's anything much more on that feed business. I think. . . they used to say to open the doors there, it cost, I shouldn't make a statement, it seemed to me it was $80,000. See, we manufactured, and I don't know how much we built, they built those bulk bins after I came there. Now that's all taken down, and everything. And so forth.

SJ: Bulk bins where, on your property?

RB: No, on their property there on McNear's. Yeah. And they had these bins, well, they went up there, I guess, 35 or 40 feet, just laid 2" x 6" 's down. And one of 'em 'ould go over this one, and the next time it was here. And the next time it'd go across. I spiked them all down. This edge flat. That's the way that was in there. They built that up in the early '50's, I think. Bulk plant. Then the trucks came in with grain. You had a grading there, drive over there and open up, and dump it into any bin you'd want. That saved a lot of trouble and time.

SJ: So, then, Randy, in '63 you were laid off by Golden Eagle? I guess the business was just slackening down?

RB: Well, we was going through a lot of changing back and forth.

First, they moved a lot of the stuff over on the other side. It was almost going to close the McNear side. They, couldn't, for some reason, for a tax purpose, when they bought it, make any changes for the year or more. Then after that, with everything about over there, then they turned around, came back over on this side again, and through all that changing, and everything, why, and then as I say, I had probably the biggest part of my business was poultry, and not dairy. And a lot of them was out. So, that's when I got out of there.

PUMP WORK
FOR
LES PETERSEN WELL DRILLING
1963-70

And I think I told you I was home there, and Les Petersen called me, wanted to know if I'd come and help him out a few days, catch up on pump work. That lasted almost 3 years.

SJ: You were drilling? Or no, not drilling; you were workin' the pumps.

RB: Working on pumps. Not drilling, but I'd be a helper on the rig. See, according to the law, you was not supposed to have one man on a rig. A well driller has one of the highest insurance rates there is.

And I'd work on them some of the time in the Winter, or something of that kind. As a helper. But most of the time it was on pumps, there, with Les. And then that one time, when Les came out, it was up there at Crislips. He about tipped that over.

SJ: Where was Crislip, in Cotati?

RB: No, they was up near Fulton, on the Old Redwood Highway.

SJ: Were Crislips Cotati people?

RB: No.

He died. And his wife used to be his helper on the rig. She could operate the rig. . . .

SJ: Whose wife? Crislip's?

RB: Yeah.

SJ: Now, is this location where Les is now, on the Redwood Highway?

RB: Yeah.

She had a drinking problem. And after a couple years of that, she was wise enough to get rid of it (the business). Les took it over.

Well, I was workin' down here. And Ray [son of Les] went up there, was going to manage. Well, he just came out of the service. Sometimes he wanted to be Sergeant. He was havin' trouble with the men. So, Harriet [wife of Les, mother of Ray] wanted me to go up there. And I says, here it's a ten-minute commute. Up there it's a half hour, and so forth. Well, she says, we'll pay your time for one way on the road. Nah, I say, you don't pay anybody else. You can't do that. So, anyhow, I stayed down here. But every now and then, why. . . .

SJ: They could have just paid you more money, period.

RB: Every now and then why, I'd have to go up there and work for a day. And so on. And then, he gradually got weaned over, up there. Yeah. But, Ray was no diplomat. (laughs) I went out in the yard, at the office, one time. About 8 men: "We're goin' up there, and call Les up. Either get Ray out a' here, or we're all quitin'." I (tape is scratchy; cannot understand). . . .talked 'em out of it.

SJ: He turned out all right, didn't he?

RB: Well, it was one thing about it: He had to show his authority. Any little thing that you did that he didn't like, you're fired. He hired and fired more people in one year than Keyt, there at Cotati, probably did in twenty. But, he had, then a lot of times he didn't

have too efficient a help. He finally came out of it pretty good, I guess. Yeah. He was really good to work with. I worked with him down here. But, when he became a manager, why, he was a little different.

SJ: Some people don't know how to handle that as well as others.

RB: (laughs)

WORKING FOR JIM MALONE'S COTATI OAKS HARDWARE 1970-80

SJ: You left Petersen in about '66, and went to work for Jim Malone, Cotati Oaks Hardware?

RB: Yep. That was '70, fourth of July, I think, was when I left. I built the garage there. Shop went in.

SJ: Which garage? Which shop? You're talkin' about your own garage? Which was right across the street from the old Cotati Oaks Hardware.

[Cotati Oaks Hardware was founded by general contractor Jim (and Eleanor) Malone, in a new building which is currently the Orowheat Bakery return-goods retail store. The property is still owned by Jim and Eleanor, who's home is behind, along with a large trailer and RV storage lot. The Malone's sold their hardware business to the Barker Brothers, Jack and Ron, who relocated it into a new building on Commerce Boulevard, Cotati. Barkers later sold the business to their employees, Joe and Linda Cserna (and their sons, Joe and Chad), and sold the property to G.K. Hardt of Santa Rosa.]

RB: Yeah. I had this friend of mine. He built homes. He used to have chickens. He'd worked as a carpenter, years ago, as a young man, for a year or two or what, I don't know. Chicken business was lousy there, about that time. He had a place that was ideal. It was about a hundred and eighty feet deep, stretched, 10 acres that stretched for better than a quarter of a mile.

He started up on the far end, built a home, and right on down, that way. Well, he was building then.

Well, as I say, he was a good friend, and all. So, I was over there one evening, and we was talkin' about it. He said, do you want some help? And I says, Well, I figured you was busy, and all. He say, no, I finished up. I'll come and help ya'. So he came over, and he worked a day and a half. He had arthritis in his shoulder. The second day he was taking a hammer in both hands tryin' to drive a nail in. He couldn't drive one if he had to.

So, I finished the job, the garage. And well we had the framework and the rafters up. The outside framing was on. I'd put in the windows and door. I was just finishin' the little door there. He came back in. He started walking around. (laughs). One of my aluminum windows I put in upside down.

I took the glass out, you know, for fitting and everything. But I made a mistake. I got too close. So I took the circle saw, and went down, cut a groove in there, so I could bring it back in there and run it along the other side there. Instead of knockin' the 2"x 4" out. And so on. Other than that, it was pretty good.

SJ: So, when you were workin' for Malone, you were doin' outside plumbing, installations, service. In other words, people comin' into the hardware store, wanted plumbing work done, you were doin' that.

RB: Well, repair, maintenance.

SJ: You were doin', also, some small engine work, on lawn mowers?

RB: Yeah. I started that there, too.

SJ: And when you were openin' up your own little shop across the street that was intended to be for mowers, small motors?

RB: More of that, yeah. As I said, well, Jim said we had 250 to 300 mowers came in that third year there. And I know we had as many as ten a day.

So, there was a guy, he was a retired auto mechanic, lived up there in the Todd area, and he'd get mowers. But he's settin' back there where there wasn't too many people ever found him, I guess. So, I used to take 'em up to him three, four of 'em at a time, and let him work on 'em, pick 'em up again, cause I couldn't take care of it. Well, then I still had to go on over for the service calls. Yeah.

No, I wasn't (laughs) without work.

WORKING FOR HIMSELF
FOR LOCAL REALTORS
FOR KEN GARNER
1980-ON

SJ: But then you left Malone, set up your own little shop. You weren't doin' too much in the way of mowers. You were, instead, you were working, you said, for local real estate people, doing plumbing and so.

RB: Then I started in with Garner [Ken Garner Real Estate] there, painting.

As I said, that one summer there, I put on 90 gallons on those townhouses for him. And, no, and I had a sign built, by Oliver Chadwick there, painted it, to hang out for mowers and small engines. I never did put it up. 'Cause I had plenty of work all the time.

SJ: It's now '90. So, you stopped workin' when, about '80?

RB: Well, see, I started in, built the garage there, that was in '70. Yeah.

SJ: When did you stop workin', about '80? 1980?

RB: Well, I still did a little work, all the time. But, very little. And, I didn't care for it any more.

HEART PROBLEMS
KINDA' DISCOURAGED
SOLD THE RANCH
DRIFTING AROUND
VISITING KIDS AND FRIENDS
STAYED AT MY COTTAGE A COUPLE MONTHS
WHILE I WAS AWAY TRAVELING
1988-1990

SJ: Now, your property's been sold in 1989. Probably late '89.

RB: In Novem' . . . . a year back to November, when we signed the escrow papers.

SJ: Yeah. And I tried to talk you out of selling it. The water bond comes in. You can handle the water bond expense with your accumulated investments over the years. At that time I'm thinkin' (like most are thinking, that we in the North Bay are immune from military/aerospace cutbacks drawing down the over-stimulated economy of the 1980's) the property will continue to rise in value. But you're just at that point, tired of bein' on the ranch. Developers are wantin' to do something else with the property, probably next . . .

RB: Well, the boys think, I got a feeling, that I should just foreclose on it.

(end of tape; can't hear conversation)

please see epilogue

Epilogue

Recall that Randy's health had been very good most all of these past 80 years, but with some heart trouble in the last couple years, and presently, a minor leg injury.

Randy and family headed south back to Walnut Creek, the home of Charles and family, and then on to Redondo Beach, the home of Kelly (Bo) and family, immediately following our recorded conversation here.

Back home in Redondo Beach, one morning about 5 days later, Kelly (Bo) woke up, came into the living room. Randy was sleeping in the big easy chair, as he sometimes did. "Dad, would you like a cup of coffee?"

No answer. Randy had died sometime during the night in that chair.

What a good way to go, when our time comes to go. Happily in the home of his son, daughter-in-law, granddaughter and grandson. He had finished the Redondo Beach back yard retaining wall he referred to as The Great Wall of China. He had enjoyed Christmas and New years with both his sons and families.

He had visited old friends back in Sonoma County. We had completed this oral interview we had talked about, but put off for a couple years. His health had been good most of his life. This heart condition had irritated him, after being so long strong and active.

Randy had come to a time, in 1988, when he didn't want to maintain the ranch anymore. This heart thing was bothering him. He sold the ranch. His buyers, not having the holding power in a turned-down economy, and not being able to do all the development in the City of Cotati they had hoped to, were in default at the time of Randy's death. It was another year before the property finally reverted back to Randy's sons.

At the time of this writing, 1994, the sons own the property. It is for sale with the same commercial real estate broker who had helped Randy make the sale, a referral of Steve to this other man who specializes in commercial and development property.

With the brothers' ownership of the property, Steve became their local property manager, with rental of the home, of the barn (to the same Steve) and renting out grazing land to two local cattle men.

At the time of this final edit, now 1998, the property is still for sale, with the same commercial real estate broker. Development plans for the back, residential acres, worked in conjunction with neighboring property owners and the City of Cotati, have been frustrated by neighbors who don't wish to see the development and by the City's "catch 22" conditions.

We work together, Charles and Kelly, the other real estate broker and I.
And we remember Randy, fondly.

PETALUMA HISTORICAL MUSEUM
Oral History Program

Unconditional Release Agreement

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PLACE Rohnert Park, CA

DATE 30 December 1990

Randolph Bruekner
(Interviewee)

(for the Petaluma Historical Museum)

PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
Oral History Program
Narrator Personal Information Questionnaire

Name Bureker Randolph Jacob
Last First Middle (Maiden)

Address c/o P.O. Box 7428 Cotati, California, 94931

formerly of 8028 Gravenstein Highway, Cotati, California, 94931

Marital status: Married___ Single___ separated Divorced___ Widowed___

Birthdate 12-9-1908 (or 1910) Birthplace Jefferson County, Iowa born at home near Pleasant Plain and Brighton

Length of residence in Petaluma (or Sonoma County)___

Education: Elementary school Pleasant Plain for 6 years

Secondary school No. 7 School Fairfield, Iowa for 2 yrs. Grad___
Fairfield, Iowa High School

College had agriculture college scholarship, but turned it down, times were tough Grad yes

Other___

Occupation(s) or former occupations(s) retired

1931-37 worked at poultry ranch White Leghorn Farms; after 1 yr became manager
1937-39 Taylor Milling, on the road selling
1939-43 Globe Mills, San Francisco driving truck to and from Consumer Feed Store Petaluma

Travels 1943-45 Basalt Ship Yard Napa, California pipe fitter
1945 Marinship Sausalito, California shipbuilding
1945-50? (3 yrs) S.A. (Sard) Peterson Well Drilling and Pumps worked on pumps and some plumbing (no relation to Les Petersen)
leg injury or so (17 years)

Organizations, clubs 1947-63/ McNear Company 15-16 years, then sold out to Golden Eagle 1-2 yrs.
front-office retail salesman 6 months, then outside salesman 16 years Novato, Sonoma, Penngrove, Cotati
1963 Golden Eagle Milling laid off

Other special interests 1963-66 Les Petersen Well Drilling & Pump pump work and well drilling
or July 4, 1970
1966-69/ Jim Malone Cotati Oaks Hardware outside plumbing installation and service
1969- self-plumbing through referral, home building crafts work through and for local Realtors

Additional comments___

Travels back home to Iowa each 2 years, Canada Taiwan, Japan several years ago

Organizations YMI (Young Mans Institute 25 years 1931-56 or so

THANK YOU!

PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
Oral History Program
Family History Questionnaire as of January, 1990

	Name	Birthdate	Birthplace	Deceased? Date
Parents*	Joseph Adolph Bureker	1875-1966	came to U.S.A. at age 6 in 1881 Germany Basenhasen Westphalia	
	Pauline Glanzman Bureker	1880-1971	her father, Nicholas, from Basel, Switzerland Lockridge, Iowa	
Brothers & Sisters	Carolyn (Carrie) Bureker Johnson	1905-		
	Margaret Bureker Benda	1906-1983 (cancer)		
	Randy Bureker	1908- (or 1910?)		
	Joe Bureker	8-23-1914--12-28-89		
Grand-parents*	Randy wears his paternal grandfather's wedding ring Henry Bureker	1824-1909	Basenhasen, Westphalia, Germany	
	Elisabeth Hennius Bureker	1830-1913	from same area	
	Nicholas Glanzman	-1910 at age 88	born in Basel	died in Lockridge, Iowa
	Glanzman	-1920's		
Spouse	born in Petaluma 1904 died in Petaluma January 1988 Frances Kelly Bureker	married 1935	separated 2-1966	never divorced
Children	Charles (Charlie) Bureker	1937-	lives in Walnut Creek, California	
	married Barbara Molinari	6-27-66 or 67		
	Randolph Kelly Bureker	1944-	(Charlie called him Bo Bo, so became Bo)	
	married Ching Lan		met in Taiwan 11-1-80	
	earlier married for 2 years to Susan		1977-79 or so	
Grandchildren	Charles			
	Brenda age 18 or 19	born 1971 or 1972	Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo	
	Karen age 13 or 14			
	Kelly			
	Cheryl age 9			
	Kevin age 6			

*Please include maiden name of mother and grandmothers.

THANK YOU!